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COLONEL RANALD S. MACKENZIE AND THE REMOLINO RAID:
PROMPT IN THE SADDLE

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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PREFACE

In 1873 America was enjoying a period of relative calm and prosperity. The Civil War had been prosecuted to its ultimate conclusion. Reconstruction, for better or worse, was well under way in the Southern states; the country was beginning to expand with vigor towards the West and all that this new land promised. Internationally, the United States had gained a certain grudging respect among the old, established European nations. The future looked bright. Yet trouble was brewing on the western frontier--big trouble. Stories of Indian attacks against settlers on the frontier had recently been more frequent and more horrible. The Texas frontier seemed to bear the brunt of these assaults. The terrible consequences of one of those attacks at a lonely place called Salt Creek had been reported by members of the Fourth Cavalry:

The poor victims were stripped, scalped, and horribly mutilated; several were beheaded; and their brains scooped out--their fingers, toes and private parts had been cut off and stuck in their mouths; and their bodies--now lying in several inches of water and swollen or bloated beyond any chance of recognition--were filled full of arrows which made them resemble porcupines. . . . One wretched man, who, fighting hard to the last, had evidently been wounded, was found chained to a wagon wheel, and, a fire having been made from the wagon pole, he had been slowly roasted to death--that he was still alive when the fiendish torture was begun, was shown by his limbs being drawn up and contracted.¹

In the recent past, the Civil War had rightfully monopolized the news and military priorities. Nevertheless,

Indian attacks such as the Fetterman disaster in 1866, the Canby assassination in 1873 and the Salt Creek massacre in 1871 were becoming more and more common. Public outcry was becoming louder. The federal government had listened to the cries from the West and had even committed some troops to help protect certain areas. At the close of the war in 1865, the General-in-Chief of the Army, Ulysses S. Grant, upgunned the nations commitment to protecting the West. Grant sent one of his finest tactical commanders, Lieutenant General Phillip H. Sheridan, to the West. Sheridan was appointed the Commander of the Division of the Missouri and told to clean up the Indian menace.

In truth, the United States was at war again. Not a war as it had recently known, with precise battle lines and thousands of soldiers thrown against one another; but a war against the Indian--a vicious, elusive enemy. A total war raged from the middle 1850s through 29 December 1890 at the Battle of Wounded Knee. It was a war which raised to new levels the horrors of conflict; and a war in which far different tactics were required to defeat the enemy. Sadly, it was a conflict which would ultimately spell the end of the Indian race. This war--the Indian wars--had classical aspects of other wars: long marches, battles, and campaigns. However, in this war, as the result of the often isolated nature of the combatants, commanders had to think and react without the benefit of normal oversight or guidance. As a result of the isolation, single actions often were significant unto themselves.

This paper will describe one of those single tactical actions. It will describe the background, the action itself, and the long-term results of the action. It will focus on a raid made by Colonel Ranald Slidell Mackenzie and his Fourth Cavalry into Mexico in 1873. The paper will indicate that this single, swift, bold stroke, made at the proper time and place at the tactical level, had a significant long lasting effect at the strategic level.

Obviously, campaigns are variously defined. The modern FM 100-5 "Operations" describes a campaign as "a series of joint actions designed to attain a strategic objective in a theatre." In Mackenzie's day joint operations were not yet in vogue. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, a campaign represents a long-term military activity involving a series of battles in order to defeat a specific enemy in a theatre. A campaign includes all of the logistics required to sustain that event and as Clausewitz instructs, involves a long period of time, generally about a year.

In order to better understand the importance of Mackenzie's raid and its consequences, we must first examine some of the background of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie, the Texas border in 1873 and the Kickapoo Indians.

MACKENZIE

Then I heard the voice of the Lord
saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who
will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I.
Send me!' Isaiah 6:8

Of the crop of young cavalry commanders which the Civil War

produced, Colonel Ranald Slidell Mackenzie was surely one of the finest. While he did not have the eye for detail of Wesley Merritt nor the tactical skill of Nelson A. Miles, nor the flair of George Armstrong Custer, Mackenzie was blessed with an impetuous and daring spirit. In his own quiet way he gained the admiration of his troopers and caught the eye of his superiors. In the process he failed to gain the fame of his better known contemporaries. Nevertheless, he was the grist for legend.

Mackenzie was born in 1840 in New York City. His father was Navy Commander Alexander Slidell Mackenzie. A brief look at Mackenzie's unique family will provide some insight to the man he eventually became. Edward S. Wallace, in a concise sketch of Mackenzie entitled "Border Warrior," notes that the cavalry commander "came of unusual stock." His father's actual surname was Slidell, but he assumed his wife's family name of Mackenzie. Commander Mackenzie was the author of several books, one of which supposedly influenced a literary friend, Washington Irving. Wallace observes that the senior Mackenzie was the center of a national controversy in 1842:

As commander of the US Brig Sommers, he put down some childish folly he pleased to call a "mutiny" and hanged Acting Midshipman Phillip Spencer, son of the Secretary of War, after a strange trial at sea. The suspicious disciplinarian was court-martialed but acquitted.²

Wallace reports that one of Commander Mackenzie's brothers was John Slidell, the Confederate envoy to France during the Civil War. He was the principal in the Mason-Slidell incident "which nearly brought war with Great Britain in the autumn of

1862." Another brother was the chief justice of Louisiana.

Wallace further outlines Alexander Slidell Mackenzie's lineage:

His sister, Jane Slidell, married Matthew Galbraith Perry, the Naval officer who opened Japan to the Western world in 1853, and their daughter married August Belmont of New York. The Commander's son, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie Jr, younger by two years than his brother Ranald, was a lieutenant commander in the Navy who was killed in 1867 while leading a charge against the natives on the island of Formosa.³

Wallace argues that "altogether they were an impetuous and daring breed," and concludes that after all was said and done, "Ranald led the clan."

Mackenzie began his higher education at Williams College in New Jersey at the age of 15. He was a better than average student, but a change in the family's financial status brought on by his father's death in 1859 caused him to seek admission at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He won an appointment, through his mother's influence, and dropped out of Williams at the end of his junior year to become a West Point plebe. At the military academy he excelled academically, but suffered an unusual number of demerits. Classmates described him as:

A high spirited, model gentleman; modest, determined, fearless, generous, loyal to his friends, and slow to anger. His love of sports and fondness for society of his friends was cause of his getting more than the average of demerits.⁴

Mackenzie graduated first academically from the class of 1862 and was commissioned in the engineer corps. One month later he received his first brevet for heroism at the Second Battle of

Manassas. Thus began an extraordinary career filled with numerous battles and acts of heroism.

His record reads like a chronicle of famous Civil War battles: Kelly's Ford, Second Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, Wilderness Campaign, Spotsylvania, Todd's Tavern, Petersburg, Opequan, Winchester, Fisher's Hill, Cedar Creek, Five Forks, and the surrender at Appomattox.⁵

Mackenzie's leadership style was aggressive and probably abrasive. He inherited an intensity which drove him and the units he commanded to new heights. As may be imagined, he was not universally loved. As a young colonel in a Connecticut volunteer regiment "he became a greater terror than Rebel shot and shell, and his men plotted to dispose of him in the next battle." Wallace, in his study of Mackenzie, observed that the regiment was "a rather easygoing outfit on which Mackenzie descended like a tornado in an orphan asylum." This blunt style of command would be seen in all his subsequent commands. Mackenzie's courage, nevertheless, overcame his men's animosity at the battle of Winchester:

Seeming to court destruction, he galloped along the front of his men, waving his coat on the end of his saber, braving a hail of confederate lead; when his horse was cut in two by a shell, Mackenzie was spilled and wounded, but refused to go to the rear, even at the request of his commanding general, Philip Sheridan. Within three weeks he was back to duty and from then on the regiment, to the last man, would have followed him into the gates of hell.⁶

Mackenzie was not physically impressive, in fact the opposite was true. But contemporary descriptions noted that there

was something:

A spare, slim young man of medium height. His youth was accentuated by a clean shaven face, in a day of heavily bearded men, except for long sideburns to the curve of his jaws. He had an ascetic, hawk like face and the air of a crusading Norman bishop.⁷

Mackenzie's drive to follow the sounds of the cannon led to his "perfect attendance record" in the Civil War. His exploits in these battles and campaigns led to the usual recognition in the Civil War--promotion. But the rank to which he was ultimately promoted was not usual. Mackenzie ended the war as a Brevet Major General of Volunteers, and as a Brevet Brigadier General in the Regular Army. "He was the only military academy graduate from his class (or any subsequent class) to become a general in the Civil War."⁸ His final command of the war was his proudest -- commander of the cavalry division attached to the Army of the James commanded by an officer he admired greatly, Philip H. Sheridan.

Mackenzie was uniquely suited for the cavalry. His courageous spirit and bold, audacious actions made him a natural for the crossed sabres. He was especially attracted to independent operations, an aspect of the traditional cavalry mission. A biographer noted that "the mounted arm--cavalry--was better suited to Mackenzie's restless energy than did plodding columns of foot soldiers."⁹

Curiously, through all of these war years, (and subsequent Indian wars) Mackenzie studiously avoided the limelight of public recognition. The reason for his aversion to publicity is unknown. Consequently, his record of combat leadership, heroism, and

phenomenal promotion, is not generally recognized outside Civil War purists.

While these war years were exciting and professionally rewarding, they did exact a toll on Mackenzie. During almost three years of combat, he received six wounds which required hospitalization of some sort. At Petersburg, while gesturing in the heat of battle, a ball tore off the first two fingers of his right hand. The wound gained him the nickname among the troops as "Three Finger Jack." Later foes, the Kickapoos and Mexicans, called him by another name--"Bad Hand." Mackenzie's most serious wound came at Cedar Creek. While leading a counterattack, he was wounded through the lung. That wound would trouble him the rest of his days.

As the result of one of those wounds, Mackenzie developed a peculiar quirk which warned those around him that he was angry. Captain Joseph H. Dorst, a subordinate in the Fourth Cavalry, reported that "the colonel betrayed his explosive irascibility by snapping the stumps of the first two fingers of his right hand."¹⁰ The peculiar sound of those snapping stumps could be heard a long way off. Another one of those who had first hand knowledge of Mackenzie over a period of years was his sometime adjutant Robert G. Carter. Carter describes Mackenzie from the long view:

He was fretful, irritable, oftentimes irascible and pretty hard to serve with. This was due largely to his failing to take care of himself and his wounds received during the Civil War. He kept late hours, ate but little, and slept less than anyone in the regiment. But he was not a martinet and he was always just to all the men and officers.

. . . The wound through his lung was always a most serious drawback to his physical comfort and action on campaigns and it probably, with his other wounds, added to his irritability at times. He could not ride more than 25 to 30 miles without being in great pain and yet rode 162 miles in 32 hours when we crossed the Rio Grande in 1873, without, so far as I can recall, a single murmur or sign of exhaustion. . . . Mackenzie hung on like a bull dog until the Indians begged him to let go. He had more brains than Custer, better judgment, and he carefully planned his attacks.¹¹

Perhaps the highest tribute given to Mackenzie and his Civil War exploits come from a man who also shunned public attention. General Grant, in writing his memoirs fully twenty years after the fact, remembers Mackenzie. This comment is the last Grant makes about any soldier in his memoirs.

I regarded Mackenzie as the most promising young officer in the Army. Graduating as he did from West Point, during the second year of the war, he had won his way up to the command of a corps before its close. This he did on his own merit and without influence.¹²

After the war, Mackenzie reverted to his regular rank of captain and was assigned to the corps of engineers in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. After two mundane years in Portsmouth, Mackenzie was given command of the 41st Infantry Regiment in Texas and appointed as its colonel (the second youngest in the army). The 41st was a black regiment, not considered a prime assignment.

The 41st, on occupation duty in Baton Rouge was comprised of uneducated, former slaves. Mackenzie found a regiment that was indisciplined and combat ineffective, and immediately imposed an iron discipline and an around the clock training program. He force marched the regiment across the Louisiana

countryside. Mackenzie led his troops on foot. In spite of constant pain from Civil War wounds, he completed each march at the head of the column. No doubt Mackenzie was aware that the sight of a pain-ridden commander marching ahead of his troops would deter men from dropping out, disgraced in the eyes of their peers.¹³

Mackenzie whipped the 41st into an organization which could hold its own among the number of regular regiments in the Army. While Mackenzie's Civil War reputation remained strong, he was becoming increasingly anxious to become involved in the Indian wars in the West, combat he saw as natural for him and his talents. Eventually, due to his "success with the 41st, Mackenzie became commander of the 24th Infantry Regiment at Fort Clark, Texas." Unlike the black 41st Infantry Regiment, the 24th was "a white regiment largely comprised of Irish immigrants, many of whom were Civil War veterans."¹⁴

The 24th had a solid reputation and Mackenzie was anxious to lead them against the Indians. In 1869 the regiment moved to Fort Concho, Texas and began operations against Commanche Indians who had been terrorizing settlers in northern Texas--the Staked Plains. In 1869 he used his infantry sucessfully against the Indians, a feat most thought improbable for the slow-moving infantry:

He force marched the regiment at night, and ambushed mounted Commanches and white renegades in a rocky canyon near Nacogdoches, Texas. The battle resulted in the death of thirty-three Commanches, twelve renegades, and the capture of eighty-seven rifles and carbines.¹⁵

That engagement, as well as his overall success on the Staked Plains, placed Mackenzie among the elite Indian-fighters of his day. But the best was yet to come. The border between southern Texas and Mexico had been an open sore for about twenty years. The area was made up of fifteen counties and about five thousand people. It was known in Washington as the Upper Rio Grande Border Region. The Ninth Cavalry was currently on that border, but was not meeting the threat successfully. The public outcry from the region was becoming too loud to ignore.

Mackenzie's operations on the Staked Plains made him a logical choice to rectify the situation in southern Texas. Indeed, "the powers in Washington decided that young Mackenzie was the man to clean up this dreadful mess." Accordingly, in April 1870, he was assigned once more to his real love, the cavalry. He was appointed colonel of the renowned Fourth Cavalry Regiment. Before the Civil War it "counted among its officers Joseph E. Johnston, George B. McClellan, Edwin Vose Sumner, John Sedgwick, and many others who rose to prominence in the Union and Confederate armies."

Biographer Edward S. Wallace notes further that during the Civil War "this veteran regiment had been in action 76 times, but it was on the frontier under Mackenzie that it would make its finest record."¹⁶ During the years of establishing that record, on 13 May 1873, the regiment would make a raid across the international border into Mexico which would stop Kickapoo attacks forever.

THE BORDER

The Kickapoos were lacerating the southern Texas frontier. After a bloody raid, they would drive their stolen herds of livestock southward across the Rio Grande, where the law protected them from reprisals from the U.S. Army. The Kickapoos. A.M.Gibson

By 1873, life along the border between Texas and Mexico had become intolerable. The constant attacks and looting by the Kickapoos had cost local ranchers about fifty million dollars in property losses, to say nothing of the murders and kidnappings which accompanied recent Indian raids. What troubled the local population greatly was the fact that their government in Washington either was not listening or simply did not care.

The earliest settlers who migrated to the region were given free land by the government and they set to work along the Rio Grande raising cattle, sheep, and horses. Life was harsh but reasonably productive. A decent living could be made and a few even prospered. The towns of Del Rio, Bandera, Laredo, Brackettville, and San Antonio developed quickly.

But then the Indians came. They first came during the 1850s in small, generally curious parties of a few warriors. At first they were relatively peaceful, but all that soon changed. By the 1860s, their parties were always armed and always hostile-- and they came from across the border, marauding out of Mexico.

In the beginning, the Indians stole a few head of livestock, usually during night forays. Ranchers initially considered that an irritant; the price of doing business. However, by the 1870s the Kickapoos had degenerated into a murdering band of criminals who had no respect for property or

human life. The international boundary between Texas and Mexico provided no real obstacle to the passage of these Indians.

Americans along the Texan border suffered constantly and severely from raiders based south of the border. Kickapoos (and a few Lipans and Apaches) who were refugees from the United States had found new homes in the mountains of Northern Mexico. The incursion of Indians from one nation to another disturbed relations between the United States and Mexico for years, and in the 1870s and 1880s presented the U.S. Army with one of its severest challenges.¹⁷

The fact of the Kickapoo attacks was an unhappy affair unto itself. Additionally, there were three conditions which further aggravated the Indian problem on the border.

First, the sprawling, vast desert-like terrain favored the tactics of the Kickapoo attacker. They could strike, do their damage, and ride off into Mexico before troops could arrive. Communications being what they were, the Cavalry often was not notified until hours or even days had passed. When troopers did pursue tracks, they generally led to the Mexican border where they were forced to give up in utter frustration.

Second, a spirit of lawlessness was all-pervasive along the border. The Revolution in Mexico and the Radical Reconstruction in Texas fueled this attitude of lawlessness and fostered an overall lack of accountability. The only authority was the local sheriff, the Texas Rangers, and the U.S. Army. In fact, the border territory between Del Rio and Laredo in the 1870's was considered a no-man's-land which was the haunt of the varmints and derelicts of that day.

Third, the general feeling of distrust between Texans and Mexicans led to the furthering of an already unhappy situation. There was a long history of conflict (if not war) between the two. The Alamo had occurred only 37 years earlier. Texans seethed at the failure of the Mexican government to intervene in the Kickapoo attacks. In fact, as we will see, the Mexicans supported the Kickapoos in word if not deed.

There were a variety of Indian tribes which leached off the settlers along the whole Texas border. However, the region between Del Rio and Laredo seemed to be the sole turf of the Kickapoos, perhaps the most brutal of all the Indian raiders. They had a long history of conflict against the whites.

The Kickapoos from the first contacts with white men (French missionaries and traders of the seventeenth century) had consistently and stubbornly refused to be friendly, . . . they fought against Americans in the War of 1812. . . . Because of the neverending white migration, in 1865 the bulk of the tribe migrated from Kansas to Mexico. Small groups of Kickapoos had previously migrated to Mexico where they met with much favor from Mexican officials and the general populace. A Kickapoo village near a Mexican town was insurance against raids by other tribes.¹⁸

The Kickapoos may have had good reason for their hatred of Texans. An incident occurred in 1865 as the Kickapoos were migrating across Texas to Mexico which polarized Kickapoo bitterness for Americans in general and Texans in particular. As the tribe moved towards its new homeland, a group of Texans and galvanized Yankees (former Confederates), for no apparent reason, attacked the main migrating body. The Kickapoos mauled the ill-disciplined Texans who quickly retreated. Rumors claim that the

Texans fired on a flag of truce and killed a squaw who was carrying it.¹⁹ In any case, the Kickapoos felt they must continue the trek south (in a sub-zero January blizzard) to escape further American treachery. The resultant march cost the Kickapoos the death of eleven papooses and approximately fifty women and old men. They never forgot nor forgave:

Burning with hatred for the Americans and especially the Texans, the Indians arrived in Mexico in mid January and found themselves welcomed by the Mexicans. They were immediately granted wide land for their exclusive use and were furnished with seed, implements and oxen. In turn, they were expected to protect the Mexicans from plundering hooligans (Apaches and Comanches). Any loot they may gather was theirs, with no questions asked. The Kickapoos interpreted the attack made on them by the Texans in January during their hegira as a declaration of war. With real enthusiasm they accepted the challenge and within a short time became the worst scourge the Rio Grande frontier had ever known ²⁰.

The Kickapoos quickly moved in with the Mexicans and began to seek retribution against the "gringos" along the border for what they felt was an unwarranted attack. In the conduct of their grisly trade, they learned that revenge could be profitable.

They quickly discovered a new and easy way to make them rich, according to their ideas of wealth. Cattle, horses, mules, all sorts of salable items, along with captives for ransom, were easily picked up in raids across the border. Through Mexican agents, they were provided with proper documents needed to legally sell their loot to Mexican buyers. The same enterprising agent conducted a store or trading post where the Kickapoos could buy or barter for sugar, tobacco, liquor, weapons, gunpowder, or any thing else they wanted.²¹

As has been discussed, particularly galling to the border residents in Texas, was the attitude of the Mexican government towards these depredations. In 1882, Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur, the commander of the Department of Texas, (Colonel Mackenzie's immediate superior) was asked by Lieutenant General Sheridan, the Commander of the Division of the Missouri, for his appraisal of the situation along the border. Augur replied with clear frustration borne of thirteen months of watching Mexican intransigence:

The real Mexican government so far as affairs on the Rio Grande are concerned is whoever controls the great crowd of idle and vicious Mexicans who have been attached for years past to that line by prospect of plunder and robbery of the Texas frontier, and who are still retained there by their continued success in that business. In short, there is no Mexican government to negotiate concerning Rio Grande depredations. The Kickapoos hold the power, the only way to deal with them is by the sword.²²

Sheridan agreed completely with Augur's assessment. But what was to be done? Sheridan had strong feelings about what was to be done. He had reached his current rank by being aggressive and bold. Perhaps he had a plan in mind, one which would teach the perpetrators a lasting lesson. Sheridan had no love for the Mexican and Indian residents of that region. His first assignment in the Army in 1854 was at Fort Duncan, near Eagle Pass which is generally centered between Laredo and Del Rio. Paul Hutton, in his study of Phil Sheridan and His Army, surmises that this early experience along the Mexican border shaped many of Sheridan's perceptions later in his life. Hutton claims that Sheridan

believed the inhabitants of the region "felt no restraint from law and order or from any public sentiment in regard to national or international rights." Sheridan's disdain extended even to American citizens in the region who were of Mexican descent. Hutton reports that Sheridan thought they were "in full sympathy with their Mexican friends and relatives," frequently thwarting U.S. Army attempts to intercept Mexican outlaws or Indian marauders. Hutton concludes that "Sheridan was not a man to be bothered by the fetters of international law."²³

Throughout all this, the Texans felt that the federal government had a deaf ear to their plight. Although an argument could be made that the federal government had other fish to fry, especially between 1860 and 1865, the fact is, the Indian problem had been existent for at least twenty years prior to the war.

There were those in Washington who felt that the Indian problem may have been exaggerated. Surprisingly, principal among those non-believers was none other than William Tecumseh Sherman, the commanding general of the Army. However, with the election of Grant as president in 1868, events began to look brighter for the Texas frontier. Grant had extensive experience in the western theatre as a junior officer. His early experiences gave him an appreciation for the lawless environment surrounding the border. He was not at all sanguine about the Mexican government and may have even feared an invasion from those quarters. In 1868, at Grant's urging, Sheridan reactivated two posts in the region: Fort Duncan and Fort Clark.

In 1867 the government began to pay a stipend to the settlers along the border who had lost property to the Indians. While that was thought to be a good idea at the time, the sums being paid now were staggering. Payment was breaking the federal bank.²³ Grant wanted action but Sherman was not yet convinced that additional troops were required. Grant temporarily bowed to the instincts of his old friend. In 1871, in order to settle the matter once and for all, Grant sent Sherman on a trip to Texas to hear testimony of settlers, inspect troops, and assess if there really was a problem. That trip changed Sherman's mind quickly and irrevocably.

At last the Indians went too far. Santana led a hundred men on a routine raid into Texas. The party included some of the most prominent Indians . . . including Satank and the medicine man Mamanti. They hid themselves in a favorite ambush, Salt Creek, (between present day Jacksboro and Graham) an open stretch of road between Forts Richardson and Griffin. A small train escorted by a handful of soldiers appeared. The raiders made ready to attack. But Mamanti stopped them; a far richer train would be along soon, he prophesied. And so it proved. Ten freight wagons manned by many teamsters came into view. The warriors swarmed to the attack. Five whites escaped, but the rest fell under the onslaught. The raiders mutilated the corpses, plundered and burned the wagons, and rode off with forty-one mules. The wagons spared by Mamanti's vision, it turned out, carried none other than the General in Chief of the U.S. Army (Sherman), come to see for himself whether Texan complaints had any validity. ²⁴

Sherman was now a believer! All in all, the leadership of the Army had not experienced such an enemy. Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and George Crook, were all adept at moving large

numbers of troops around the battlefield to meet an enemy which was similarly poised. The Indian was different. The rules of engagement had changed. No longer would the enemy mass to fight. No longer would he form conventional battle lines. This enemy took no prisoners--only women and children. And maddeningly, he could avoid punishment by going into another country to hide if pursued. It appeared that to defeat this enemy, a new method of warfare was required. It appeared that in order to win this campaign, the Army must take bold action. There were those in the leadership of the Army of the West that were familiar with bold action.

Upon Sherman's return in October 1872 Grant reviewed the bidding with his secretary of war William W. Belknap and Sherman. They agreed that the Kickapoo Indians were clearly a menace to the border settlers in Texas. Further, they noted that the Mexican government was not being at all helpful and, in fact, was supporting the raiders. The Army's attempts by the Ninth Cavalry to halt the depredations were not effective. Grant understood that a drastic measure must be taken.

On 5 February 1873, he ordered Sherman to send the following letter to General Augur, commander of the Department of Texas:

The President wishes you to, give great attention to affairs on the Rio Grande Frontier, especially to prevent the raids of Indians and Mexicans upon the people and property of Southern and Western Texas. To this end, he wishes the 4th Cavalry to be moved to that Frontier. . . . The 4th, as soon as it is safe to move, should march to, the Rio Grande and the 9th can be broken up into detachments to cover the Western

Frontier, the road towards New Mexico.

In naming the 4th for the Rio Grande the President is doubtless influenced by the fact that Col. Mackenzie is young and enterprising, and that he will impart to his Regiment his own active character.²⁵

Grant's order put into motion a series of events which would lead Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry into a significant tactical operation which would alter the strategic environment in that theatre.

THE RAID

A raid is an attack designed to accomplish a specific purpose in enemy territory... A raiding force withdraws after it accomplishes its mission. The withdrawal is the most difficult part of the operation.

FM 17-95 Cavalry

It was not particularly unusual for entire frontier regiments to be ordered to move from one post to another in those days. The Tenth Cavalry had moved from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Sill in 1870, and the Seventh from Fort Concho to Fort Riley in 1871. Now, the Fourth was replacing the Ninth at Fort Clark in 1873. Still, it was not a simple move.

When a regiment changed station in the days before railroads, it more closely resembled a caravan than a military formation. Wagons were piled high with all sorts of non-military articles. Ambulances, buckboards and 'mountain wagons' were crowded with women and children. Dogs rode high on loaded wagons or trotted alongside. . . . In spite of the family atmosphere, they were moving through Indian country, and all precautions were taken. The soldier's ammunition belts were full, advance guards rode ahead, all

suspicious hills were covered by flank guard. At night, the wagons were circled, horses were 'side-lined' and hobbled, and out guards were posted. At one point in the march the reason for care was apparent--debris of a burned wagon train, with human bones still scattered on the ground, where a party of Kiowas, led by a famous and dreaded chief named Satank, had surprised the unfortunate teamsters two years before (The Salt Creek Massacre). In addition to the dangers from the Indians, it was an uncomfortable march. Water was scarce, and the overloaded wagons needed frequent repairs, causing lengthy delays. ²⁶

This move to Fort Clark came at a good time. The Fourth had literally run out of Indians to fight at Fort Richardson. In the two years under Mackenzie's command the Fourth had been busy. It had destroyed two separate Indian threats in and around the Staked Plains in north central Texas. The Fourth had conducted two very successful campaigns on the Staked Plains. During those years in that region, Mackenzie developed the tactics he would use in all his subsequent battles. He learned that while it was exciting to kill lots of warriors, that was not the best tactic. On the Staked Plains Mackenzie learned that in the long run it was best to find the Indians' support base--where they kept their food, shelter, and their all important ponies. Destroy that, and the Indian is destroyed, especially in winter. "General Mackenzie concluded that the only way to be followed to bring the Indians to terms was to send large columns of troops each strong enough to take care of itself, into country occupied by the Indians and make it untenable for them."²⁷

Colonel Mackenzie did not consider the first year on the Staked Plains successful because of the small number of contacts with the Indians. However, the second year was spectacular, ending with the Battle of McClellan's Creek in September 1872. W.A. Thompson, a major in the Second Cavalry, described the action in an article published in 1897. Mackenzie, he reported, "burned up all their winter supplies and at least one hundred fine wigwams, captured two hundred squaws and children, about 3,000 horses, and killed fifty-two warriors." Mackenzie slaughtered all the horses on the spot. In all, the Fourth had only four or five men wounded. Thompson notes that, "it was the most terrible blow" the Staked Plain Indians had ever received.²⁸ One of the wounded was Mackenzie, an arrow in the right thigh, his seventh combat wound.

The Fourth Cavalry shattered the grip of the Mescalero Apache and Lipan Indians in the region. The Indian menace absolutely vanished for the next eleven years on the Staked Plains. The reputation of the Fourth and its commander as "Indian Fighters Extroradinare" was secure. However, their biggest challenge involving the dreaded Kickapoos and the border environment lay immediately ahead.

Mackenzie arrived at Fort Clark on 6 April, ten days after the regiment. That was unusual; he always rode in the lead whenever the regiment moved. However, shortly before the move from Fort Richardson he had been summoned to San Antonio. He was to escort two dignitaries who ostensibly wanted to see first hand evidence of the border frontier situation, inspect the regiment

which was gaining such fame, and perhaps conduct some other business.

On 6 April, therefore, Mackenzie rode into Fort Clark with none other than Secretary of War Belknap and the Commander of the Division of the Missouri, Lieutenant General Philip Sheridan. Both men had been active in trying to relieve the suffering on the frontier. Belknap, through diplomatic channels (with Secretary of State Hamilton Fish), had complained vigorously and often to the Mexican government about Indian activity but without much success. Sheridan, since 1870, had been strongly urging for a more vigorous military presence on the border. The truth is Sheridan may have had motives that ran even deeper than concern for border frontiersmen.

Nothing is so closely identified with Phil Sheridan's western career as the infamous remark that 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian.' It has the ring of typical Sheridan rhetoric. His enemies used it against him in his lifetime, and historians have used it as an example of military myopia and viciousness. . . . Cpt Charles Nordstrom, Tenth Cavalry, claimed that Sheridan uttered the famous remark in his presence at Ft. Cobb in January 1869. According to Nordstrom, the Comanche leader Toch-A-Way had approached Sheridan, striking his chest and declaring, 'Me, Toch-A-Way; me good Injun. 'To which Sheridan gave a 'quizzical smile' and replied, 'The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.' . . . the statement became synonymous with Sheridan's Indian policy.²⁹

Sheridan's mood during the visit was expansive. The overall campaign against the Indians in the West was going well everywhere except here in West Texas. Although there had been some setbacks and the future would bring on the unfortunate

Little Big Horn and Custer's defeat, currently, things were looking good. Even the implacable Sherman was now convinced that the border problem was not an exaggeration, and the icing on the cake was that the President had ordered one of Sheridan's personal favorites to the area which had given him so much recent grief. Sheridan could not have planned things any better himself. His ultimate plan was going to get a chance to be put into action.

On the 10th of April, after the inspection was over, Sheridan and Belknap asked to meet secretly with Mackenzie. Mackenzie surely wondered what the meeting was to be about, and why secret? Mackenzie knew that the inspection had been successful; Belknap had said publicly that the Fourth Cavalry was the best in the Army. Sheridan was more restrained, but seemed pleased.

The meeting took place in Mackenzie's quarters about 1400 hours. Sheridan had undoubtedly been thinking about the Kickapoo problem for months, because in the next two hours he passed on to Mackenzie orders which were extraordinary. Sheridan's vision was unusual not only in the potential scope of the planned operation but also the vagueness of the commander's intent. Nevertheless, Mackenzie recognized that the orders when executed, had the potential of ending Kickapoo Indian problems in West Texas forever:

Mackenzie, you have been ordered down here . . . because I want something done to stop these conditions of banditry, killing, etc., by these people across the river. I want you to control and hold down the situation, and do it in your own way. I want you to be bold,

enterprising, and at all times full of energy, when you begin, let it be a campaign of annihilation, obliteration and complete destruction.³⁰

All cavalrymen relish broad, general guidance; but even Mackenzie was given pause at these orders. Mackenzie thought for a few moments then asked quietly: "Sir, under whose orders am I to act? Will you issue the necessary orders for my action?" Sheridan exploded at this unexpected question by Mackenzie. Pounding the table he screamed: "Damn the orders! Damn the authority! . . . your authority and backing shall be (General) Grant and myself." Even Mackenzie must have been taken aback. He was likely reassured, however, as Sheridan continued: "With us behind you in whatever you do to clean up the situation, you can rest assured of the fullest support. You must assume the risk. We will assume the final responsibility should any result."³¹ Colonel Mackenzie understood. He asked no more questions.

Mackenzie, probably more than any man alive, was sensitive to the international situation on the border. His sensitivity was tempered by the instructions given him by General Sheridan. As he probably analyzed the situation, the key phrases in those orders were "do it in you own way" and "annihilation, obliteration, and complete destruction." To these precepts, Mackenzie unquestionably added his own "surprise" and "speed."

Mackenzie's way in the past (and future) focused not so much on the reduction of the Indian warriors but the destruction of their logistic base and whatever was peripheral to that. Mackenzie's philosophy of Indian-fighting was clearly focused on

destruction of the Indians' will and ability to fight over the long haul. He had learned on the Staked Plains that destruction of foodstuffs, shelter, ponies, and the capture of women and children would ultimately bring any Indian to his knees. This concept worked in the North; he felt it would work against the Kickapoos. The only difference was the border.

Mackenzie studied the situation. He decided he would attack the largest Kickapoo village he could find in Mexico. The size was important, because the larger the village the more supplies; and a large camp would symbolize that any Indian haunts were not secure. Mackenzie's eventual plan was to conduct a night march across the border to the village, and be prepared to attack at dawn. He would kill all the Kickapoo warriors he could find, incinerate the village, and capture women, children, and animals. He then would exit back to the border as quickly as possible. Mackenzie feared reinforcement from other Kickapoo settlements or worse, Mexican military intervention. In any case, his troops could not rest once the march began until after they had returned to American soil.

The first unknown Mackenzie faced was which village to strike. To this end, Mackenzie secretly sent civilian scouts south into Mexico to find a target for the raid and dispersed his six cavalry troops to six different locations distant from Fort Clark. He was worried that Mexican spies would see his preparations if he trained at Fort Clark. He selected his civilian scouts well. He chose three of the best in the area--Cox, Green Van, and McLain. Ike Cox was the post guide at Fort

Clark and was a legend in his own time. Green Van and McLain were not as experienced as Cox, but both had recently lost their ranches to marauding Kickapoos. They had good reason to find the Indians.

Mackenzie planned in excruciating detail. He "prepared for what he correctly surmised would be one of the most daring, amazing, and arduous exploits in the annals of Indian warfare." He drove himself and his troopers. "Although the men of the Fourth were tough, experienced and possibly unexcelled in discipline, Mackenzie ordered grueling drills and carbine practice." Daily he visited one of the six troops in their field sites. "Every anticipated field operation, mounted and dismounted, was thoroughly worked out."³² Mackenzie worked feverishly. His drive and energy motivated his subordinate officers. He spent long hours studying maps of the area of operations, and evaluated intelligence information supplied by scouts and local ranchers.

There was the inevitable grumbling and complaining. Especially onerous was Mackenzie's edict that sabres must be "razor sharp." Captain Carter, for example, tells of Mackenzie's orders to him to ensure that sabres were being sharpened:

I was especially directed to see, in as quiet a way as possible, that all sabres in the Command were ground to a razor edge. This stunt was a very great 'puzzler' to all the old Captains . . . , who in some of their 'kicks' and 'grouches' against such a 'fool proposition' came near 'spilling all the fat in the fire,' and some doubted my authority for such an almost 'unheard of' thing, for we had never, thus far, carried such encumbrances as sabres on an ordinary Indian campaign. But I finally carried my point, by

quietly quoting that well worn old Army phrase, 'It is by direction of the Commanding Officer.'³³

At last, Mackenzie's civilian scouts had found a large Kickapoo encampment near the village of Remolino about 60 miles from Fort Clark. The scouts reported to Mackenzie the details of their finding. Mackenzie asked a few questions and he was satisfied that the village was to be the target.

Mackenzie was almost ready; all that was missing was the timing of the plan. He sent Cox, Green Van, and McLain back to Remolino to report to him when the warriors had departed the village. At 2300 hours on 16 May 1873, the three breathless scouts reported to Mackenzie that all of the Kickapoos, except a few for security, had ridden off that morning towards the west. The scouts said they were prepared to lead Mackenzie's regiment to the village.

It was obvious to Mackenzie that it was now time to execute the plan. He launched couriers on their way to his scattered Troops with orders to rendezvous at a predetermined spot on the Las Moras Creek south of Fort Clark near the border. Carter with A Troop at the time, describes the alert:

I was . . . half drowsing [sic], when the loud clattering of hoofs were suddenly heard, causing [Colonel Beaumont and I] to sit up in our blankets, and Major Clarence Mauck rode hurriedly into camp from Fort Clark and gave the orders from Mackenzie to 'pack up' and 'saddle up' immediately. . . . It was between 2 and 3 A.M. . . . Beaumont turning to me, said: 'What is the meaning of this--where are we going?' I quietly replied, 'Quien Sabe--perhaps across the Rio Grande.' He asked me

no further questions.³⁴

All that night Fourth Cavalry troops marched from their campsites to the rendezvous point. Mackenzie planned to leave there around 1100 hours on the 17th for a fording site on the Rio Grande near the town of Quenado. M Troop was late, so the regiment did not begin its move towards the border until 1300--Mackenzie was surely unhappy with this delay. It is easy to imagine that "Bad Hand's" stumps were snapping.

The column arrived at the ford around 1800 hours. Mackenzie called for a halt at a covered position barely north of the ford and assembled all his officers and noncommissioned officers. For the first time since April 10 he explained in detail the mission, his concept, and what he expected. In closing, he detailed the dangers of the operation:

Theirs would be a physically exhausting undertaking, and the risks would be great. In addition to the danger of being killed or wounded in attacking the Indian village, they faced the possibility, if captured, of being hanged or riddled by bullets from a Mexican firing squad. And there was the added possibility of an ambush, either going in or coming from the village, by irate Mexican citizens, or even by the Mexican army. . . . He concluded by admonishing the men to maintain the utmost silence.³⁵

Mackenzie did not mention two of the darker aspects of the mission that were surely of great concern to him. First, this raid could lead to war. The Mexican government was very unstable and they may see this as a provocative event which demanded retribution. Secondly, Mackenzie understood that the responsibility for what he was about to undertake was his alone.

Sheridan did not tell him to raid anything. Only "do it in your own way." This was his way. He had done it before, but never over an international border. Was there a court martial in Mackenzie's future? 36

The troopers waited for darkness. It is easy to imagine the quiet determination that now settled over the Fourth Cavalry. Their commander had explained what was coming and the dangers associated with the mission; and they now understood what all the training and secrecy was about. Mackenzie may have taken strength from the fact that they had been here before. The troopers were all veterans; they knew what to do. Final preparations were underway: tightening saddles; checking ammunition and weapons; and inspecting their mount's hoofs; perhaps some rest for the veterans who could sleep before a fight;--and surely prayers were said. Colonel Mackenzie was nervous, irritable and anxious to begin. The stumps again were snapping.

At 2000 hours on 17 May 1873, the Fourth Cavalry splashed across the Rio Grande and headed southwest. It was an historic moment. Mackenzie's order of march was the three civilian scouts, Cox, Green Van, and McLain and himself in the lead element; next came fourteen additional civilian scouts followed by the main body. The main body was in columns of four in troop columns. Each troop had its own food and ammunition strapped to the backs of pack mules. In all, Mackenzie was leading three hundred and sixty men, seventeen officers, and fourteen civilians.

As planned, the column avoided the main trails and followed mule trails and cattle paths through dense cane break and low

chaparral. And it was night. Carter notes that "so little was known of this desolate region except by locals that it appears on maps as Terreno Desconocido (Unknown Land)."37

The column moved for an hour without problems. However, about 2130 hours a potentially severe problem arose. The pack mules simply could not keep pace with the main body. The trails were narrow and the mules had overhanging loads. They could not keep up. About 2300, the troop commanders decided to consolidate all the mules under the quartermaster at the rear of the column, hoping that as a group they could keep pace. That solution did not work either. The column was becoming dangerously spread out. Mackenzie was continuing to press on, not knowing about the difficulty in the rear. The troop commanders as a body, realized something must be done. They advised Captain Carter of the problem and asked him to alert Mackenzie. The troop commanders wanted to cut the mules free to return to Fort Clark.

Carter caught up with his commander and advised him of the difficulty and the troop commander's suggestion. Mackenzie was not pleased with this unforeseen potential delay.

Mackenzie exploded with a burst of profanity, but, convinced that the alternatives were too risky, he ordered a five minute halt, during which the men were to fill their pockets with hard bread and then cut the packs loose.³⁸

This delay, as well as others relating to the pack mules, would prevent a dawn attack as planned. Mackenzie increased the gait to almost a killing pace to try to make up for the lost time. He knew he was behind schedule and cursed the quartermaster for his "unworthy mules."

As the column moved, the horses kicked up enormous dust clouds as they raced towards Remolino. Those in the rear certainly suffered. The Fourth had now been in the saddle continuously for ten hours. Carter remembered that "it seemed as though the long night of fatigue, discomfort and thirst would never cease." At daybreak he noted the "faces of the troops are pallid and corpse-like" and "in the rear, the men, in columns of fours, their bronze faces also covered with dust." He studied their faces. "Their features, haggard with loss of sleep, and the strain of the all night ride, gave them a kind of hard, desperate appearance."³⁹ As the column neared its objective, it again became obvious to Mackenzie that he would not be able to conduct the attack at first light:

Upon reaching the San Rodrigo River (near Remolino) shortly before the sun appeared above the horizon, Mackenzie ordered a halt. He allowed the men and animals to refresh themselves in the waters of the little stream, . . . Then all made ready for the charge on the village. As a safety measure, Mackenzie had the men fill their pockets with cartridges, rather than carry them in their saddlebags, for a dismounted trooper might be cut off from his horse. ⁴⁰

The regiment had now been awake for thirty hours; eighteen of these hours were passed in the saddle over a torturous route. They were now preparing to attack an unknown enemy. Again, Captain Carter provides a description of those final moments before that eventful attack:

Word was passed along to re-cinch or tighten the girths. A rapid inspection of all arms was made. We were making ready for the charge, we were in the bed of the stream, concealed by its banks. It was broad daylight. It was an inspiring sight as the

column, again in motion, wound its way under cover of the fringe of bushes, towards the object of its terrible task. We were rapidly approaching the Indian village. All talking ceased, and the clatter of the horses hoofs upon the stones, the jingling of spurs, and the rattle of equipments grew almost painful.⁴¹

As the regiment climbed out of the creek up a slight rise, there was spread before them the unmistakable silhouettes of Kickapoo wikiups and huts about a mile distant. Mackenzie quietly moved the troops into attack position with I Troop leading. The plan called for platoon charges into the village. As each platoon completed a run and a fire by volley it would wheel out of the way for the next platoon, then reload and attack again.

The attack was a complete surprise. None of the Kickapoos had an opportunity to mount a defense let alone sound the alarm. If the Kickapoos had security posted, it was not evident.

The cavalrymen hit the Kickapoo lodges as suddenly and as destructively as a tornado. The surprised Indians, . . . scattered panic-stricken across irrigation ditches and fields of corn and pumpkins, with (I troop) in close pursuit. Taking cover in ditches and ravines, the old men and women defended themselves with whatever weapons they had been able to lay their hands on. When the rear Troops struck the village, Mackenzie ordered them to dismount and with torches to fire the reed and grass huts. The crackling flames, the sharp crack of rifles, the thud of horses' hooves, the yells of cheering troopers, the hysterical screams of Indian women and children as they sought to escape all mingled to create an indescribable horror. ⁴²

Although the scene in the village was undeniably confused, Mackenzie pressed on with the mission. Sheridan's guidance of "annihilation and destruction" were foremost in his mind.

Mackenzie watched as his troops did their destructive work. They were well disciplined. There was no evidence of unnecessary killing. The cavalrymen went about their business professionally, if not with relish. There were some close calls:

Sergeant O'Brien of 'A' Troop, a grey and grisly old Irish soldier who knew no fear, was pursuing an Indian, both-afoot. (O'Brien) had fired and missed, when the savage, thinking he had no time to reload, turned suddenly, and, whirling a heavy, brass-bound tomahawk, threw it with such precision as just to graze the Sergeant's head. Walking deliberately up to him with his carbine, throwing in a cartridge quickly, as he advanced, from the magazine into the chamber, O'Brien said 'I have you now, you old spalpane [sic]!' and shot him dead at fifteen paces."⁴³

It now was time to consolidate and Mackenzie gave the word to prepare for the march back to the border. Incredibly, although the Fourth had been on the move for thirty hours and in contact for the last six hours, they suffered only three casualties. One trooper was seriously wounded (he would die shortly before crossing the border), one was hit in the arm, the last a slight facial wound.

About noon the regiment began final preparations for the return march. The horses and men were watered, travois were prepared for the wounded, and the regiment's contract surgeon, Donald Jackson, amputated the arm of the trooper who had been wounded. Jackson was adamant that if the arm was not excised, the trooper would die. The trooper lived.

Mackenzie was extremely careful in his preparations for the trip out of Mexico. He wanted no repeat of the "pack mule

affair." Although he had no mules to contend with on this march, he did have a potential problem--the prisoners. Mackenzie knew from his Staked Plains experience that his capture of women and children would have enormous effect on the Kickapoo warriors when they returned. He wanted to take the prisoners home safely and alive. To that end, he assigned prisoners to ponies and had those ponies carefully guarded by troops.

About 1300 hours, Mackenzie ordered the regiment to mount up and move out. The Fourth Cavalry, with no rest in 36 hours, was about to begin a trek out of a hostile land through countryside whose natives were fast becoming aware of the raid. The exodus, therefore, would not follow the approach march. Mackenzie took a westerly tack, wisely avoiding as many populated areas as possible. His men were exhausted now. They would become much more weary before they reached the Rio Grande and Mackenzie could not expect them to fight effectively. Their survival lay in their ability to move quickly and avoid contact.

Mackenzie had two fears. First, that the Kickapoo main body would return early from its hunt, discover what had happened, and ambush his regiment. Second, and more darkly, he was anxious that they may be intercepted by a regular Mexican force which would not take kindly to the U.S. Cavalry raiding in Mexico. Those thoughts were on his mind as they rode into the sun. If any of the cavalrymen looked back to the village, they saw that "ruin and destruction now marked the spot--a cyclone could not have made more havoc or a cleaner sweep."⁴⁴

The raid was a tactical success. The nineteen dead Kickapoos, the forty captured squaws and papooses, and numerous horses attributed to that fact. Frankly, there was little time to consider the success. The regiment must now make a march through hostile territory under very difficult conditions. Today's cavalry manual FM 17-95 is correct in its depiction of the withdrawal. It is the most difficult portion of the mission. Carter explains:

Everywhere we met the black, malignant scowls of El Mexicano. It was a novel and most astonishing spectacle for them to behold a body of United States Cavalry, with Indian prisoners, swiftly traversing their territory for safety beyond 'El Rio Bravo'. We felt that their hatred foreboded evil before reaching American soil. Their occasional exclamations in muttered almost incoherent Spanish, such as, 'El Gringoes' indicated anything but a friendly spirit to Los Americanos.⁴⁵

Mackenzie's pace outbound was more measured than that he used inbound. He positioned the fourteen civilian scouts to his flank and rear as a security measure. After riding for six hours, darkness overcame the cavalry. While the cessation of the pounding heat of the sun was a blessing, the real terror of the unknown of a moonlit night lay ahead.

Mackenzie passed the word through the column that all officers and noncommissioned officers were to assist the file-closers in keeping the column together. The bright moon made navigation easier but the shadows it created probably caused the imaginations of the exhausted cavalrymen to run rampant. Every trooper, in his exhausted state, could imagine Indians or Mexicans behind each bolder or in every arroyo. The civilian

scouts kept sending erroneous reports that the enemy was closing in on them. Hour by hour the march dragged on. Carter in his exacting treatise, On the Border with Mackenzie, explains the toils of the march:

We wearily rode on. . . . This had been the third night that many of us had been without sleep or rest. . . . Everywhere the men drowsed and swayed in their saddles. . . . The eyes seemed strained out of our heads. The tension was so great that our heads seemed to fill to bursting. . . . Such was our mental condition, . . . our minds bordering on the insane."⁴⁶

Yet they pressed on. The indomitable Mackenzie never looked back, but kept pushing to the limit, he wanted to get out quickly. Near dawn, the column was delayed when the exhausted squaws and papooses began literally to fall off their mounts onto the trail. Mackenzie could smell the Rio Grande and he was not to be delayed. He ordered the papooses lashed to the squaws and the squaws lashed to the horses. It may have been cruel but it was effective.

At last, almost precisely at dawn, the lead elements of the Fourth Cavalry cleared the last mesquite range south of the border and splashed into the Rio Grande. Captain Carter describes the scene.

Some of the men were fast asleep low down on their saddles with their arms tightly clasped around their horses' necks; others were drowsing and swaying or nodding bolt upright. . . . The condition of the prisoners, although ludicrous, was pitiful in the extreme. They had been riding, lashed on the captured ponies, doubled up and by threes. The children, half naked and streaked with dust and sweat, deprived, by being bound, even of the privilege of lying down upon

their ponies' necks, were fast asleep, their black heads and swarthy skins presenting a striking contrast to the blue-coated troopers who surrounded them. . . . All faces wore that dull grey, ashy, death-like appearance, indicative of overworked nature and the approach of exhaustion.⁴⁷

At 0600 hours, 18 May 1873, the Fourth Cavalry returned to its home land. The mission was an exceptional tactical feat. From its beginning at the roadhouses on the Los Moros, to the just completed return, the regiment traveled more than 160 miles in thirty-two hours. They razed three Indian villages all without sleep. The only nourishment was the hardbread they had stuffed in their shirts. Mackenzie had led his regiment on a superb feat of arms. Of that fact, there was no question. The full implication of the raid however, would not be seen until the following weeks and months.

AFTERMATH

Affairs of the Rio Grande line, have become almost entirely settled since the handsome chastisement given to the Indians in Mexico by Colonel Mackenzie, 4th Cavalry.

Report to the Secretary of War
From The commander of the
Division of Missouri.
September 1874

The border was surprisingly quiet. It was more quiet now than in anyone's memory. No longer did ranchers fear for their property or even their lives from the assaulting Kickapoos. They could go about their day-to-day business without fear of Indian attack.

The first official word of the Remolino raid was sent on 20 May by the acting commander of Fort Clark to General Sheridan. He wired only that a raid had occurred and that it was successful. Sheridan, although unsure of the details, (in fact he was unsure that Mackenzie had crossed the border, but had a suspicion) wired Secretary Belknap on 22 May endorsing Mackenzie's actions and anticipating the raid by saying, "it is more than probable that Mackenzie crossed into Mexico and had his fight on that side of the Rio Grande. We must back him."⁴⁸

Sheridan may have had some natural doubts at this point about the extent of what Mackenzie may have done. If he had those thoughts, they were short-lived. Typical of Sheridan, he began a small campaign of his own designed to support Mackenzie. Sheridan first sent congratulations to Mackenzie through Augur, directing him to "send word to Mackenzie that he is all right and will be sustained, that he has done a good thing."⁴⁹

Sheridan doubtless felt from a loyalty point of view that he had to back up those final words he spoke to Mackenzie on 10 April--"Damn the orders! Damn the authority! Your authority and backing shall be (General) Grant and myself." Notwithstanding that, Sheridan had overextended his authority when he so instructed Mackenzie. Paul Hutton, in a seminal treatment of Phil Sheridan and his Army, highlighted Sheridan's predicament:

Sheridan's personal approval was not enough to protect Mackenzie if his violation of an international border were condemned by the powerful in the press, government, and society at large. . . . He begged the secretary of war to make every effort to uphold Mackenzie, warning that 'if our government disavows the act of his crossing

into Mexico then all hope of stopping Indian raids and cattle thieving on the Rio Grande is at an end.' Sheridan reiterated his conviction that the Mexican government was unable, or even unwilling, to put a stop to the Indian raids and his soldiers could 'only stop the bad work by the fact that we may cross the river and exterminate the murderers and thieves. But if we make the acknowledgment of an error on the part of Mackenzie there never will be any fear of our crossing again, and murdering our people and stealing our property will continue with increasing abandon.'⁵⁰

Sheridan felt that Mackenzie had done the proper thing at the proper time. There was just one small loose end he still needed to wrap up. Astonishingly, Sheridan's commander, General Sherman was unaware of the raid. Even Sheridan did not relish Sherman's legendary wrath. Nevertheless, it was time to tell him. Sheridan sent a message to his commander explaining the mission, that Mackenzie was under his orders, and perhaps rationalizing a bit:

I have for a long time been satisfied that it is the only course to pursue and bring safety to life and property on our side of the Rio Grande. . . . There should be no boundary when we are driven to the necessity of defending our lives and property against murderers and robbers.⁵¹

William T. Sherman did not agree fully with Sheridan's analysis and was not happy. Whether Sherman was angry because he had not been informed or because he disagreed with Sheridan, is unknown. Regardless, he backed his subordinates although he replied somewhat sharply,

Mackenzie will of course be sustained, but for the sake of history, I would like to have him report clearly the facts that induced him to know that the Indians he attacked and captured were the identical Indians then

engaged in raiding Texas. Had he followed a fresh trail there would be law to back him.⁵²

Although Sherman seethed about being left out of the plan, he blamed this affront on one man--Secretary Belknap. Sherman despised the politician from New York and had not spoken to him in months. (Sherman's instincts were well founded. In 1876 Belknap was impeached for accepting bribes and resigned in disgrace). The extended silence may have some bearing on why he had not been informed of the raid before the fact. Anyhow, although Sherman's feelings toward Sheridan were not damaged and he publicly supported Sheridan and Mackenzie, (Sherman wept unashamedly at Sheridan's grave in 1888), he never forgot the slight. Years later, none other than Colonel Nelson A. Miles felt Sherman's lash as he described his plan to attack marauding Sioux in Canada and cited Mackenzie's raid as a precedent for a cross border operation:

Because as you explained Generals Sheridan and Mackenzie once consented to act unlawfully in defiance of my authority in a certain political contingency, is no reason why I should imitate so bad an example.⁵³

Sherman's ignorance of the raid begs the further question: was the President aware? Notwithstanding Sherman's stature and his special relationship with Grant, the President probably knew. In response to a Sheridan question as to the magnitude of the support, Belknap replied that "you and Mackenzie will be sustained as thoroughly as possible, there is no difference of opinion amongst us on the subject."⁵⁴

On the Mexican side of the border, reactions to the raid were evident but not overwhelming. There was a general alert that was sounded throughout the northern tier of Mexico that the "Gringos" had invaded. The following was written to Colonel Mackenzie by the American Consul to Mexico and describes what he saw on the southern side of the border when the raid became known:

About two o'clock yesterday afternoon (18 May, 1873) the drum was beaten here terribly to bring together the citizens of this place. They were taking their siesta and got up rather slowly, but when they heard that 600 gringos had crossed over and violated the National Territory, they gathered rather rapidly."⁵⁵

On 23 May 1873, two Indian commissioners who visited what was left of the villages at Remolino, found scant evidence that the Indians had returned. In fact, the Kickapoos were still terrified that "Bad Hand" and his troopers were in the area and might attack again.

The general apathy by the official government in Mexico is further evidence of the lawless state that the region had fallen into. It may have been felt that while a raid by the cavalry into Mexican lairs was unusual, that was the price the lawless in that region had to pay. Violence breeds violence.

In fact, there was no official Mexican government protest over the raid for 33 days. There was no enthusiasm in Mexico for creating an international incident out of what was probably just desserts. To completely allay any fears in Washington about possible retributive action by the Mexicans, the Mexican Minister

in Washington, Ignacio Mariscal "sent a note to Secretary of State Fish (eight months after the fact) stating that no similar offensive against the United States by Mexican troops had been or would be authorized."⁵⁶

After all was said and done, the raid was supported by those in authority (at least publicly). Thankfully, it was politically expedient to support Mackenzie's raid as the result of the ground swell of support which exploded. Thanks were most vocal from those who benefited the most from the raid--Texans. Newspapers from Del Rio to Galveston screamed the praise of the young cavalryman and his regiment. Letters of thanks and congratulation poured into headquarters from all classes of society. An unprecedented action taken by the Texas legislature probably best sums up the sentiment towards the raid. On 25 May 1873, the legislature unanimously passed a resolution which formally thanked Mackenzie:

Whereas reliable information has been received that General Ranald Mackenzie of the U.S. Army with troops under his command, . . . did cross the Rio Grande, and inflict summary punishment on the band of Kickapoo Indians who harbored and fostered by the Mexican authorities have for years past been waging predatory warfare on the frontier of Texas, murdering our Citizens, carrying their children into captivity and plundering their property:

Therefore, Resolved . . . that the grateful thanks of the people of the state and particularly the Citizens of our Frontier are due to General Mackenzie and the officers and troops under his command for their prompt action and gallant conduct in inflicting well merited punishment upon these scourges of our frontier.⁵⁷

Thus comes to close one of the most remarkable feats of arms in the history of our Army. While the tactical success of the raid was important, it pales in comparison to the long-term overall significance. During the next few years, it became apparent that Mackenzie's tactical action at Remolino had the effect of a much larger campaign--at a fraction of the cost. This single event produced several positive effects along the frontier.

First, Kickapoo attacks completely stopped along the border. This peaceful state of affairs lasted from three to eight years. None of the subsequent attacks came however, from Kickapoos. They had been defeated in detail by Mackenzie. The "gringos" had killed some of their warriors, completely destroyed their shelters, captured many ponies, and captured forty squaws and papooses. That hurt the Kickapoos. Suddenly nothing was safe or secure. "Bad Hand" had demonstrated that the Americans were not at all hesitant to now cross the border. The Kickapoos had had enough!

The raid "was astutely planned and was carried out with a machine-like precision which delighted the military tactician." Historians have noted that "it was an operation which turned the tide of the Kickapoo war on Texas and resulted in the return of the entire Mexican Kickapoo band to the Indian territory (at Fort Sill)." ⁵⁸ Not all historians agree about the success of the raid. Nevertheless, most agree that Mackenzie's raid brought long term results. Robert M. Utley, a noted historian and one of Mackenzie's detractors, has grudging admiration for the action:

Pitting half a cavalry regiment against a handful of women, old men and children, the Battle of Remolino can hardly be classed a great feat of arms. It is even less creditable because Mackenzie knew the fighting men had departed and hastened to strike before they returned. . . . Nevertheless, Remolino produced results. For the first time the Kickapoos began to negotiate seriously with the U.S. Commissioners for a return to the United States. Three months after Remolino, 317 began the trek back to Indian Territory, and two years later another 115 made the journey. Also, fearful of further punishment, those who remained in Mexico dramatically scaled down their Texas raids.⁵⁹

The second campaign-like effect of Mackenzie's raid is the fact that new political arrangements governing "hot pursuit" aspects of chasing renegades were established between the two governments of Mexico and the United States. As has been discussed, previous to the raid, those who raided could use the border as a refuge. That was no longer the case after 1873:

This raid resulted in the Mexican government coming down from their "high perch", and instead of covering up and concealing high handed, brutal, murders, atrocities, and whole sale robbery along the river, it consented to negotiate an International Treaty by which either country could pursue bandits, horses and cattle thieves and armed desperadoes operating on either side of the line, or, as it was called, a "hot trail" across the border and, punish them.⁶⁰

The third and final aspect of the raid, which duplicated campaign results, was that the tactics used by the Fourth were copied throughout the Army and used with positive results in lieu of more expensive campaigns. It became almost standard procedure for the Army of the West to try to find the Indian lair,

obliterate it, and wait for the Indian to "come in."

In 1876, for example, Brigadier General O.C. Ord, Commander of the Department of Texas, and then Lieutenant Colonel William R. Shafter, commander of the 24th Infantry "shared the belief that the best way of dealing with the new wave of marauding was to root out the marauders in their homes as Mackenzie had done." Ord realized that it violated the sovereign territory of a friendly nation, but "instructed Shafter to go after the offenders in their Mexican villages" after a series of atrocities in 1876."⁶¹ These tactics, when used, never failed to bring the Indian to negotiation of some sort. Mackenzie used them often throughout the rest of his Indian-fighting career.

Colonel Mackenzie's raid into Mexico was not the end of his or the Fourth's work against rampaging Indians. They were called by Sherman in 1874 to go to Montana and later they captured Red Cloud himself. All-in-all they were a formidable force in this nation's wars against the Indians. Mackenzie's raid, however, stands as a unique achievement. It is a solid example of the fact that at times a swift, bold, stroke at the enemy's center of gravity may have the effect of an entire campaign. Urgent Fury and Desert Storm suggest that contemporary planners may recognize the wisdom of Mackenzie, however unconsciously.

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